

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT
HOLYOKE

INFORMANT: ASA BENNETT
INTERVIEWER: CHRIS HOWARD BAILEY
DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 1988

B = CHRIS HOWARD BAILEY
AB = ASA BENNETT

SG-HO-T310

[There is a great deal of noise (music, people's voices) in the background, which makes many words and phrases unintelligible.]

B: (- -) Shifting Gears Project at the Massachusetts FolkLife Festival, the thirtieth of September, 1988. Uh, Mr. Bennett I want to thank you for agreeing to talk with us. I know you're visiting from Georgia, ah, visiting your daughter. But we're trying to collect memories of people who, and their working lives, and I just wondered if you'd just briefly tell us a little about your background.

AB: I was born near Washington, Georgia. You want the date? (B: Yeah, sure) January the fourteenth, 1913. (AB: Uh huh) Um, [clears throat] I lived there most of my life, but I traveled all over the Southeast for three years with the railroad. And it was in Florida, Jackson, Florida. And I been in forty-nine states (AB: Uh-huh) and I have a daughter Joyce who lives here, Granby. (B: Uh-huh) [Few words unclear] up in this area a whole lot since she's been up this way.

B: Very good. What did you work at in your life? What was your first job?

AB: First daughter? (B: Your first job) Ohhh. My first job was, well I was bred on the farm and uh the first public job I had was [unclear] job [rest of comment unclear].

B: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And you were involved in lumber? (AB: Yes I've been [unclear]) The lumber industry. What, you went into the lumber industry?

AB: Ah, no I raised timber. (B: Uh-huh. Oh you raised the timber) I have operated a sawmill. (B: A salt mine)

B: Oh so, so you raised the trees (AB: raised some, yeah) and had them cut down. [both talk at once] Ah, very good. What, what would your typical working day be like? What would you do when you got up in the morning? What would you work, how would you work during the day?

AB: Now? (B: Yeah, no then, then) Then? (B: Yeah) Well, I had a varied proposition. I had timber, cattle, uh I also raised some crops, but mostly timber and cattle. Later I got in a small manufacturing [rest of comment unclear] So I've been in [few word unclear] (B: Right, wh-, yeah, varied; what was the manufacturing plant? What was the industry?) We manufactured uh lawn mowers, go-carts, fence gates, individual products [unclear] (B: Um hm, so) [Unclear] (B: So you went from farming to industry?) Well, I was in both of them at the same time.

B: So you were both at the same time. Why did you diversify into industry?

AB: Well, the plant went broke and I with a little money basically took it over and operated it for about ten, fifteen years. (B: Uh-huh)

B: So you had people working for you? (AB: Yes) Were they local people? (AB: Yes ma'am) Uh-huh. When, when you were raising the, the timber uh, could you tell me something about what's involved in raising timber?

AB: Well, uh mostly I grew timber that came back naturally. Well we planted a lot of it [unclear]. My son uh has planted about a hundred acres this year in [unclear]. (B: Uh huh) On land that I used to own. He now owns. (B: Uh huh, uh huh)

B: And what kinds of crops did you grow? What kinds of crops did you gr-grow?

AB: Crops? Cotton , corn and those were the main crops other than hay. (AB: Um hm)

B: The cotton, did, did, what did you do with the cotton? Where did you sell it to?

AB: Well, we sold it locally. (AB: Uh huh. What to, to mills?) No, it was to [unclear]. We didn't have any cotton mills in my home. There were some in Augusta not far away, and Athens also. (B: Uh huh, uh huh) Most of them didn't have a, a cotton mill [unclear]. (B: Um hm, um hm)

B: And you manufacturing plant, lawn mowers. What made you choose lawn mowers? Was it because uh, you, you said you were manufacturing lawn mowers.

AB: [Clears throat] Well, ahh we added that to it uh. The plant was a, you could call it the motor scooter plant. And we just added some more things to it. (AB: Um hm) Lawn mowers was one of the things that I added to it. (B: Uh huh, uh huh)

B: So what happened is that the farming industry you were, were experiencing some kind of

loss, and, and, and therefore going into the, the business, manufacturing side was a way to pick things up. Is that what happened?

AB: No, it was the other way around. (B: The other way around!) The farming was supporting the manufacturing [both talk] business in my case. (B: Really! That's interesting! Uh huh) But ah, this plant just went out of business and I had a interest in it. (B: Uh huh) It was a stock [unclear] proposition. And I took it over and retired most of the stock as I went along, and eventually all of it. (B: Uh huh) So I did, my son and I owned it a hundred percent when we sold out [unclear]. (B: Uh huh)

B: So you're retired now.

AB: Yeah I been (B: Uh huh) retired ten years.

B: Ten years! Good heavens! And, and wh-, you travel?

AB: Yes I've done quite a bit of traveling since a boyhood friend of mine and I drove to Alaska and back the first year [unclear]. (B: Oh wow! Terrific!) And uh I (- -)

B: Had, had, the boyhood friend, had you known him all your life? (AB: Yeah, I grew up real close to him) [both talk] Yeah, you kept in touch with him. Yeah. (AB: Yeah) That's nice. And, and what was he, what business was he in? (AB: Beg your pardon?) What business was he in.

AB: He was a, a farmer primarily, but he uh operated, managed the largest store in [unclear] for several years and he retired from there about the time I did. We, we were born in the same year. (B: Ohh! That's nice) [coughs] I'm uh beginning of the year, and he's at the end of the year. [interviewer laughs] Well we were gone thirty-two days and didn't even have an argument! (B: Oh, that's unusual, huh?) [interviewer laughs] My wife says must have been a boring trip. (B: That's right!) [interviewer laughs] (B: That's funny!)

B: What kind of industry is mainly in Washington?

AB: Well, the largest industry is uh, manufacture of lumber. Uh, they bring it in to a large sawmill and cut it into lumber and dress it. And ship it out ohh, some of it comes up this far [unclear]. (B: Huh!) But uh, we have a dye plant, we have a, a fiberglass plant, [unclear] plant, and we have a plastic producing plant, and another one that was connected with uh, dye and fabrics. But that plant went out and it's been replaced, and I don't know exactly what they manufacture out there. But uh, (B: Hm) it is operating. (B: Yeah) And all the plants are operating. We don't have any, any closed plant except uh, we had a milk plant that, that pet milk, we had that for several years and they merged with uh another company in Atlanta, Georgia and they eliminated eh a milk plant there, but it's still a retail business there. (B: Um hm, um hm) So we did lose a milk plant (B: Um hm) that employed about sixty people.

B: Did that affect the town very much?

AB: Not much.

[end of tape]